

1997 - SHORTWAVE YEAR IN REVIEW by Glenn Hauser
for VOA Communications World, Jan 3, 1998
and Continent of Media, Jan 1998

More shortwave stations faced financial crises in 1997. Voice of Russia kept cutting languages and services, even Russian, and just now English, no longer 24 hours, and off the air during North American evenings.

Radio Prague feared for its future, but I still heard it on the last day of the year. QSLing, its DX Club, and even answering listeners letters had to be suspended. Belgium dropped two languages, its DX club, and reduced QSLing, but started relays only in Dutch?! Also obliged to stop QSLing was Radio Australia but it survived major budget cuts, losing 80 jobs, several languages, and the government preferred to close the Darwin transmitters than let any of ten foreign broadcasters use them, especially Radio Free Asia. Deutsche Welle put less money into jobs but more into programming and opened new transmitters with digital capability at Nauen. NBC Papua New Guinea faced financial ruin over a former employee's lawsuit, and struggled to maintain services, tried commercialization which lasted only three days. North Korea could not maintain its extensive shortwave schedule; jamming anything in Korean got first access to limited electricity. Cuba jammed indiscriminantly, while Radio Havana's transmitters kept breaking down.

A little station can also be a big problem, when it puts out spurs day after day--that's TIFC Costa Rica from 9645.

Transitions--Radio Ulan Bator became Voice of Mongolia as the year started; Voice of Free China became Taipei Radio International as it ended [actually, Radio Taipei Internationol]. WGTG converted from political to missionary programming and started testing a second transmitter and antenna. World Harvest Radio bought Prophecy Countdown's WVHA at a fire-sale price. Budapest decided Berlioz wasn't Hungarian enough, so the music of Liszt now identifies it.

In the money--China Radio International with a new Beijing building including a luxurious coffee bar, and new American-made transmitters near Urumchi, which allowed more old transmitters to be used to jam-- American broadcasts. Iran also kept adding more languages, but with 28 transmitters, only four at a time could be heard broadcasting VIRI, sometimes interfering with itself. What could they be doing with the others? It's not enough but Radio Canada International now relies on at least 15 million dollars a year. Mailbag had three hosts last year, and

RCI has just been reorganized. CBC deprived us of Royal Canadian Air Farce, Double Exposure and Now the Details.

The end for VOA Bethany, Ohio, came in December as towers and antennas were demolished. The Gloria and Maxoqueira sites in Portugal were closed with plans to move the transmitters elsewhere.

Among the shortwave stations we lost: Monitor Radio, and WSHB is still for sale. Kiwi Radio New Zealand, moving to FM. Temporarily or almost gone--Tahiti, CFCX Montreal, Radio Bayrak, Northern Cyprus, China's relay via Mali, HRMI Honduras. Norway closed its Fredrikstad site, but brought it back for one last special. AWR pulled out of one Slovakian site and then the other [almost].

HCJB announced it would have to dismantle its shortwave station in Ecuador, but has other possibilities in Africa and Australia. KWHR Hawaii added another transmitter; WINB Pennsylvania came back to avoid losing its license; new missionary outlets were starting up in Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay and Chile. And perhaps by February, Macon, Georgia.

New shortwave outlets surprised us from Liberia, Star Radio and Radio Veritas, but VOA's abandoned site there was reported to be a deathtrap for refugees.

Radio Free Asia kept adding languages, and was promised many millions of dollars more for 98. The dictatorships it targets are openly hostile with jamming and condemnation. And some other countries won't cooperate, so RFA uses private transmitters in Palau, Saipan, Hawaii and Alaska.

New relay arrangements kept on coming: Sri Lanka and now HCJB via the UK; spare German transmitters took on AWR, Croatia, Lithuania, Switzerland, Poland, several clandestines, and demonstrating a monumental lack of taste, even Brother Stair. Greece got onto VOA relays within the USA, a tremendous improvement; now we're hoping Thailand will do the same. BBC's relay from Thailand went into full operation replacing Hong Kong. La Voz del CID lost access to El Salvador, so started programming on WRMI.

Unfulfilled plans--WRMI spent all year trying to get its second antenna on the air for better signals in North America. Chuck Harder declared he would put another shortwave in Florida, but then backed out. Grandiose plans at XERTA in Mexico for multilingual, multifrequencies, but succeeded only in testing one

frequency for a few weeks. XERMX still did not get its 100 kilowatt transmitter on the air. The Electra radioship project still had not started from its secret Caribbean island. All India Radio planned for relays to reach North America.

Disappointments for two stations trying South African transmitters. The fishy, much-hyped Investment Channel lasted seven weeks; World Music Radio three months without selling a single commercial.

Anniversaries of note: the 50th for Ecos del Torbes, Venezuela and Radio Nederland; number 10 at Radio For Peace International.

Pirate radio provided new DX targets in Madagascar, and allegedly, San Marino. Allan Weiner's next shortwave project will be legal; the FCC is allowing him to build a station in Maine, but Brother Stair can get all the airtime he wants. Peruvian pirates proliferated mostly outside the broadcast bands, but a few got legal on new inband frequencies. VOA avoided the 13 meter band, WEWN and RFPI pioneered the 43 meter band, and Norway the 15 meter broadcast band.

DX Programs--even once every three weeks was too much for Portugal to continue, and Japan axed Media Roundup. Korea abolished Shortwave Feedback for Mortiwave Feedback, and set up toll-free fax numbers in many countries. Austria updated Shortwave Panorama to Intermedia, but only in German. Hungary's DX Blockbuster celebrated its 40th anniversary. Disgusted with lack of support, Len Winkler gave up Ham Radio and More.

For broadcasts in English, Jordan outshone its neighbors with six and a half straight hours per day, while Israel could manage only bits and pieces. Iraq tried to revive some English hours, but everything that could go wrong, did go wrong. Radio Japan kept reducing the amount of English relayed via Canada. France pretends it does not broadcast in English to North America, but Central America.

BBC claims to be the most popular international broadcaster with at least 143 megalisteners.

Obituaries last year include the world's best known shortwave listener, Arthur Cushen; pioneer US broadcaster Joe Costello of WRNO who lives on in his taped announcements; Hungary's DX editor Laszlo Pinter, a.k.a. Len Scott; Jorge Mas Canosa, godfather of Radio Marti. At Voice of Russia, Carl

Yegorov did not die; he just went back to his real name, Carl Watts.

Hotbeds of clandestine radio, back and forth--Iraq, Iran and Kurdistan; Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan; and Nigeria, one clandestine against the military regime grew to four--Kudirat, Voice of Free Nigeria, Radio NADECO, and Radio New Nigeria, each from a different shortwave site.

Shortwave listening could get you jailed in East Timor, by the Indonesian imperialists, if you were tuned to Portugal.

Disaster department: destroyed by fire were transmitters of Voice of Hope, Lebanon, and VOA Sri Lanka. Tonga resumed shortwave but for only two weeks until blown off by a storm. Cyclones damaged missionary stations in Guam, again; can't they take a hint? Radio New Zealand was evicted from its building, and its only transmitter threatened by volcanic ash.

Shortwave finally became more popular from Ireland, despite the lack of transmitters. West Coast Radio started doing live call-ins to North America; RTE did sports specials besides daily news; and Emerald Radio with a series of features, but listener response ruined by the stupidity of the Dublin Post Office.

Swiss Radio International stopped sending flowers to lucky listeners each month. Glen L. Roberts Fully Disclosed that he always listens to shortwave, and does his program wearing high heels.

I make an issue of attributing sources, but no time to do it here; you will find most of the sources in my monthly column for Monitoring Times. ###